



LBJ and Westmoreland (1966): How to persuade Hanoi that the U.S. meant business?

MR. JOHNSON GOES TO GUAM

In the chill of an inky evening late last week, Air Force I whined aloft over Washington, carrying Lyndon Johnson and his war counselors 8,100 miles to Guam and yet another top-level review of the struggle in Vietnam. Even before he left, the President had tipped the tone if not the content of the final communiqué: an ever deepening resolve to step up the pressure until Hanoi calls it quits. And circumstance forced him to break perhaps the biggest news in Nashville instead of on Guam's Nimitz Hill: Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge was coming home from Saigon—and veteran trouble-shooter Ellsworth Bunker was taking a brand-new command team into the field to replace him.

The premature disclosure was triggered by columnist Joseph Alsop, reporting in Saigon, who had got word of the switch and was preparing to scoop the President. Instead, Mr. Johnson scooped Alsop, inserting the announcement toward the end of a long defense of his Vietnam policy before a joint session of the Tennessee Legislature. He was, he said, "drafting" Ambassador at Large Bunker for the top job, switching Ambassador Eugene Locke, 49, from Pakistan to Saigon as Bunker's deputy, and dispatching Robert W. Komer, 45, the President's own staff expert on the "other war"—the pacification program—into the field with them. He announced the shifts so suddenly that not even topside Washington was immediately certain

what the new organization chart would look like. But the shake-up signaled Mr. Johnson's determination to press the war with a brand-new team tuned more closely to his own wave length.

His Nashville speech, otherwise, was less remarkable for what he said than for how he said it. Tennessee was, of course, the logical place for the President to celebrate Andrew Jackson's 200th birthday and an even more logical setting for a full-dress recital of his Vietnam policy to a legislature that had just gone on record as endorsing it. His mien was sober, his message determined, his emphasis heavily weighted to the military effort. He had been forced two years ago, he said, to choose between defending South Vietnam or abandoning it, and all free Asia, to "the forces of chaos . . . The choice was clear. We would stay the course, and we shall stay the course."

Punishment: He was at pains to defend the bombing of North Vietnam, this time not only as a tactical necessity but explicitly as a punishment for Hanoi's aggression. Once again he tendered a pledge to talk peace "at any time." But, he added dolefully, "it takes two to negotiate . . . and Hanoi has just simply refused to consider coming to a peace table." Once again, he quoted the price for de-escalation: a reciprocal move by the other side.

The main business on Guam would be a detailed review of U.S. strategy to hasten that long-awaited day. Some

skeptics in the Honolulu-based Pacific Command wondered aloud whether the trip was really necessary; one senior officer who has seen the secret agenda for Guam even speculated that it was a "political ploy to crowd Bobby Kennedy off the front page." But Washington and Saigon sources both insisted there was reason enough for the session. For all the Pentagon denials, Gen. William Westmoreland is reliably reported to want more troops—perhaps as many as 100,000 in addition to the 475,000 currently budgeted for 1967. The President also will hear bids by the military to intensify the air war—and reports by civilian officials on the piecemeal progress of the pacification program.

Unquestionably the first item on the agenda would be installing the Bunker-Lodge-Komer combine with the least break in continuity. Lodge has been gradually phasing himself out of active management of the U.S. effort, and now—though he issued a pro forma statement of regret at leaving—he told one newsmen privately: "I'll be glad to get out." When Lodge finally gave notice, the President seized the moment to assign Vietnam to Bunker, a tall, flinty Vermont patrician who won Mr. Johnson's respect by fielding a succession of tough diplomatic assignments—most notably the Dominican crisis.

Bunker's age—72—might seem a debit to anyone but Mr. Johnson, whose front-line diplomatic corps is a haven for

...and up. But age didn't
Bunker from taking a bride (U.S.
ambassador to Nepal Carol Laise, 49)
only two years of marriage.
Washington's intervention in Santo
Domingo by forging a coalition civilian gov-
ernment and paving the way for with-
drawal of U.S. troops. The inside word
was that Bunker would be trying to re-
peat that kind of feat in Saigon by help-
ing weave South Vietnam's bickersome
civil and military factions into a new con-
stitutional regime.

If Bunker is a model of diplomatic pa-
tience and tact, Bob Komer is all go-go—a
professional enthusiast with a penchant
for knocking heads and bruising feelings
in the process. The news that he would
be spending more time in Saigon was
greeted there with almost unanimous
dismay by U.S. officials who vividly re-

mained to be settled at Guam, Komer is
likely to take over management of the
deputy, William J. Porter, 52, who is
tired, ailing and ready for reassignment
(probably to Saudi Arabia). Porter's other
duties—the day-to-day operations of
the embassy—are likely to fall to Locke,
a Texas friend of Mr. Johnson's whose
credentials include a Phi Beta Kappa
key, a Yale law degree and a successful
first ambassadorial stint in Karachi.

New Math: With the new command
cadre assembling on Guam for the first
time, U.S. officials insisted that the talks
would stress pacification rather than ma-
jor new military decisions. Yet the Pres-
ident's will to press the military effort was
plain. He was heartened by the latest en-
emy casualty totals—an estimated 12,000
dead in February. But the enemy was

Nations Secretary-General U Thant
—a secret message to North Vietnam urg-
ing a cease-fire and a Geneva-style con-
ference with Hanoi, Saigon and the Viet
Cong all represented. Unlike some past
Thant proposals, this one is acceptable
to the U.S.—but Washington doubts the
feeling in Hanoi will be mutual.

The Guam conference was yet another
Johnson show of commitment to disabuse
Hanoi of any notion that stalling would
pay dividends. The President was per-
suaded that only the increased military
pressure together with the painful tran-
sition to civilian rule in Saigon would
soon bear fruit. In fact, at the weekend
South Vietnamese Premier Nguyen Cao
Ky's military directorate and the Con-
stituent Assembly reached agreement on
a new constitution—just in time for the
Premier to bring along a copy to the
Guam conference.

Moment of Glory: Guam may turn out
to be a fleeting moment of glory for Ky.
One of Bunker's most ticklish assignments
may well be easing Ky out—and one of
his prime allies may turn out to be
Madame Ky, who has been telling
friends that her husband's appetite for
the high life might better be satisfied
by a job as ambassador to Paris.

"It is a painful course we pursue,"
Lyndon Johnson summed up at a White
House conclave of governors the day he
left for Guam (though this time, in the
face of Republican resistance, he did not
ask them for a blank-check resolution of
support). And the most painful task of all
was persuading Hanoi that the U.S. still
meant business. That was the message of
Guam—and the meaning of a passage
late in Mr. Johnson's Nashville speech,
when, addressing himself directly to Ha-
noi as if Ho Chi Minh were somewhere
in the room, he intoned: "America is
committed to the defense of South Viet-
nam until an honorable peace can be
negotiated."

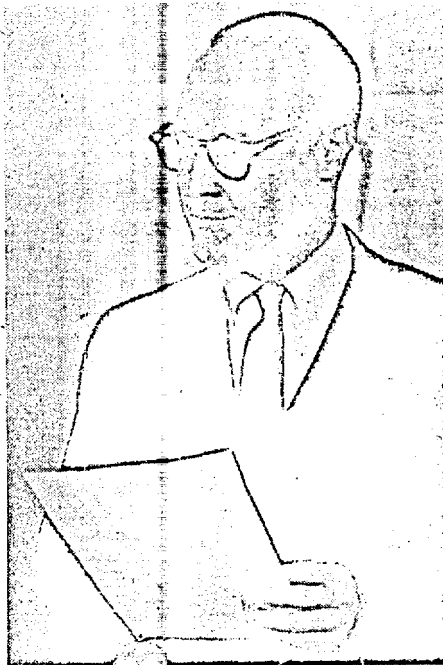


Bunker: Patience and tact

called his previous field trips as a self-
described "gadfly on the steed of state."
The Saigon skeptics loudly criticized Kom-
er as a Guildenstern at the court of
Lyndon I—a man ready to tell the Presi-
dent what he thought the President
wanted to hear. They complained that
his field reports tended to be remorse-
lessly roseate compilations. "Komer thinks
everything can be done yesterday," said
one diplomatic pro—but the President
clearly valued precisely that snap-to hus-
tle as much as Komer's sunny-side-up
view of the war.

Though his title and exact duties re-

*Among the front-rank elder statesmen: Averell
Harriman, 75, ambassador at large; John J. McCloy,
71, the U.S. representative in talks with Britain and
Germany on Atlantic security; David E. Lilienthal,
67, a Vietnam pacification specialist; Llewellyn
Thompson Jr., 62, ambassador to Moscow. And, at
73, former Secretary of State Dean Acheson remains
a frequent unofficial counselor to the President.



Komer: Go-go Guildenstern?

still infiltrating 7,000 men a month from
the north and recruiting 7,000 more in
the south—more than enough to offset
their combat losses. The signs were that
the Communists were regrouping their
forces, stepping up supply runs from the
north and digging in for a protracted
guerrilla war of attrition. With field pres-
sure mounting for the infusion of many
more U.S. troops, Westmoreland could
be expected to press the case—and Mr.
Johnson indeed may dispatch 50,000 ad-
ditional men by mid-1968. He is likely as
well to approve some new bombing tar-
gets across the border in North Vietnam
—though with most of Hanoi and Hai-
phong still off limits.

With the demise of the latest flurry
of peace rumors, moreover, Washington
has gone bearish on any early pros-
pect for meaningful negotiations. United

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